

The Charter Change meeting for September 07, 2011 was called to order at 1:00 p.m. at City Hall.

In attendance:

Dr. Genevieve Miller, chairperson

Mr. John Houben

Ms. Josephine Moore

Mr. James Vincent

Mr. Daniel Losco, City Solicitor

Meeting opened with a discussion to estimate how many more meetings would be needed to complete this process. The consensus was that there would be one more meeting for discussion of changes, and then possibly 2 or 4 more in October to review changes before submitting to Council.

Two major issues to be discussed at this meeting are the election new organizational pattern, and ability of Council to borrow money.

At this time a referendum is required to borrow money. Council needs more flexibility in ability to spend/borrow money when need arises. In reviewing other City charters.

1. Short-term indebtedness, 13 months in duration.

Gives power to council to seek short term borrowing

2. Allows Council to borrow up to 4% of real assed property base.

3. Greater borrowing cannot exceed 15% of assed. Cannot borrow using this option Council would need a referendum.

Discussion followed, The 3-tiered system makes sense, it protects the citizens so their taxes are not raised on a long term basis. It gives flexibility to the Council, while protecting the taxpayers.

When you are talking about large amounts, there would have to be a referendum.

Would there be a cap on the total amount? How would MSC borrowing affect the total City borrowing?

Committee was comfortable suggesting this type of 3-tiered borrowing to City Council.

New Election Organizational Pattern. Discussion of several ways to reorganize the election process, making longer, staggered terms.

There is concern that with full Mayor and Council up for re-election every 2 years, you could conceivably have an entirely new slate of officers with no experience.

Mayor and President should not run at the same time. Mayor and two Council members should run, and the next election the President of Council and the other two members of Council.

Mr. Houben suggested that President of Council be abolished, and there be 6 members of Council and the Mayor leads the meetings.

Mr. Losco said that having terms of different lengths, except for the first election where the changes are implemented could be problematic. It would make some council positions look more important. It is important to keep the length of terms the same.

Discussion of the benefit of staggered terms, 4 year terms and 3 year terms. Committee is suggesting 3 year staggered terms for Mayor and Council.

Four year terms would work best for election process, elections would stay the same, and every two years Mayor or Council President and two Council people would run.

Dr. Miller asked if four years was too long to ask for a person to run.

Discussion of proposal of referendum being forced by petition, as suggested by member of audience at earlier meeting.

If you have enough signatures on a petition (1000 votes), you can force a referendum on any subject.

Dr. Miller stated that there can be very unusual issues proposed. If anything and everything could go to a forced vote, the City could be hold hostage.

Committee is not comfortable with this being the norm, whereas now you go to your Council person, and Council can enact an Ordinance, or Resolution.

Committee is afraid petition driven referendums could get out of hand, costing the City a lot of money and time.

The Council is directly accountable to the electorate, and committee does not feel that a forced referendum is needed.

Committee has been asked if they want to do a real serious revamping of the Charter and “start over” and rebuild a newer, more modern Charter.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kim Burgmuller